

Brisk & Jacobson Store
51 Dauphin Street
Mobile
Mobile County
Alabama

HABS No. ALA-790

HABS
ALA,
49-MOBI,
122-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

BRISK & JACOBSON STORE

HABS
ALA,
49-MOBI,

Location: 51 Dauphin Street (formerly 56 Dauphin Street), 122-
southwest corner Dauphin and Water Streets, Mobile,
Mobile County, Alabama.
Geographic Location Code: 01-2100-097
Latitude: 30°41'32" N. Longitude: 88°02'23"W.

Present Owner: Gordon Jewelry Co., Houston, Texas.

Present Occupant: Vacant

Statement of This is one of the largest and most ornate buildings
Significance: constructed in the old commercial district of Mobile,
and the only remaining example of a building with
a large front elevation entirely executed in cast iron.
Built in 1866, this structure also demonstrates Mobile's
continuing prosperity despite the effects of the Civil
War.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1866
2. Architect: unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: A two-story brick store had been constructed on this site by 1850 and was occupied from 1852 until 1865 by the firm of Daniels, Elgin & Co., merchants in dry goods. In 1865, when this company went out of business, the property was purchased for \$50,000 by Isaac Goldsmith of the dry goods firm of Goldsmith, Frohlichstein & Co., who had operated a business since 1852 on the southwest corner of Dauphin and Commerce Streets. An advertisement in the 1867 Mobile City Directory (p. 21) indicates that the present structure was new that year and that it had been constructed by Louis Durand, a member of the General Commission Merchants firm of Sands & Co. By this date, Goldsmith and Frohlichstein had severed business connections, the former having become the president of the Mobile Commercial Savings Company and the latter forming a new dry goods firm, Frohlichstein, Hahn & Co. Besides being the location of this firm, the new building was leased to J. Brisk & Co., which in 1869 became Brisk & Jacobson, wholesale and retail dealers in men's clothing with home offices in Plainfield, New Jersey. Until 1893, the building

served as the Brisk & Jacobson store; after this date it was occupied by various businesses including carriage and harness sales, a sail manufacturer, and until 1972 served as the retail store of the Gulf Coast Jewelry and Specialty Company. Isaac Goldsmith and his heirs continued to hold the property until 1931. It then passed to Samuel J. Ripps, the SAR Realty Company (in 1948) and finally to the Gordon Jewelry Company. The building is presently listed for sale, and since it is in the Water Street Urban Renewal district, is also in danger of demolition.

4. Builder, suppliers: The foundry mark on the base of the cast-iron pilasters reads: "D.D. Badger & Co., N.Y."
5. Alterations and additions: The entire interior of the building has been successively altered and today bears little resemblance to the original. During a renovation of the 1930's, the old display windows on the north front were filled with glass bricks.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

Isaac Goldsmith (1817-1872) and William Frohlichstein were important merchants in Mobile. It is presumed that both immigrated to Mobile from Bavaria in the early 1840's and in addition to being associated in business for many years, they married two sisters, Matilda and Sophia, from Pares, Bavaria, and built fashionable adjoining townhouses in 1862. These houses are now in the Church Street East Historic District and have been adapted for use as a hotel called the Malaga Inn.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Engraving of building on flyleaf of Mobile Directory, Mobile, Henry Farrow & Co., 1880.

2. Bibliography

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Mobile Deed Books, Probate Court Record Division,
Mobile County.

Lewis Troost Map (c. 1840), City Hall, Mobile.

- b. Secondary and published sources:

Bird's Eye View of the City of Mobile, Alabama, 1873,

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Cincinnati, Ehrgotte T. Krebs, 1873.

Hamilton, Peter J., Art Work of Mobile and Vicinity,
Mobile, Powers Printing Co., 1930.

Mobile City Directory, Mobile, Farrow & Dennett, 1867.

Southern and Southwestern Surveying and Publishing
Company, City Atlas of Mobile, Alabama, Baltimore
G.M. Hopkins, 1878.

Prepared by Charles A. Herrington
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
June 28, 1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is an excellent example of mid-nineteenth-century Classical Revival commercial building based on sixteenth-century Venetian palace architecture. The entire north front is covered by an exquisitely detailed cast-iron facade, as are the decorative elements of the east side, and this is the only remaining cast-iron facade in Mobile.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is structurally sound but the cast iron has begun to deteriorate badly.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This is a four-story building trapezoidal in shape, tapering from Dauphin Street to the rear. The north front (45'-6") is divided into five bays and the east wall (103'-11") into fourteen.
2. Foundation: Not accessible.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Of brick bearing wall construction, the entire north face is sheathed in cast iron, all painted white.
4. Structural system: The only visible elements are internal cast-iron columns supporting wooden beams.

5. Stoops: The building rests on a base approximately 6" above sidewalk level; the top surface of this base is cast iron.
6. Chimneys: None visible.
7. Openings: The north facade is composed of four stories of classical trabeation employing engaged columns of the Corinthian Order and basket handle arched openings on the three upper stories. Five bays in width, the major rhythms of the elevation are established by a gradation in the height of the stories, in the classical manner, and by the pairing of the engaged columns of the end bays on the upper stories, which creates the subtle 1-3-1 rhythm typical of Venetian design. On the first floor, the simple colonnade is set in antis between rusticated piers that double as quoins and run up the entire facade to the crowning cornice. The second story, or piano nobile, receives the most elegant treatment; resting on a straight entablature, the engaged columns are raised on podia between which are stretched balustrades that act as sills for the windows. A simple rounded moulding springing from slender colonnettes and centered by a small console bracket frames each window. The entire entablatures of the second and third stories break out over the engaged columns and this rhythm is continued by the huge foliated console brackets that rise above the colonnade of the fourth story and support a deep crowning cornice. Here, the frieze is panelled, while those of the lower entablatures are plain, and on each story there is a slight variation in the mouldings of the cornices which are often so delicate that the details are not visible to the naked eye from the street below. All windows above the first story are round-headed double-hung wooden sash with three-over-three lights. The bays of the first story have been filled with modern glass blocks; originally, these bays were more open, with large display windows and a deep entrance in the center bay where there is now a modern door. The elevation of the east side is divided into fourteen bays on the ground story by equally-spaced cast-iron pilasters of the Corinthian Order supporting an entablature which is a continuation of that on the north facade. The effect of the north wall podia and balustrades is also repeated by a moulded belt course at the window sill line and by raised panels beneath the windows. Unlike the north elevation, the three upper floors of the east facade are not articulated by orders and the brick wall is treated as a continuous surface. The panelled quoins are also repeated on the east facade and rise to support the crowning entablature which is a continuation

of that on the north elevation except that here the frieze is plain and the console brackets only occur at either end, above the quoins. Window openings on the three upper floors, create a 2-1-2-1-2 rhythm, are round-headed, and have cast-iron sills and hoods supported on small brackets. The windows are double-hung wooden sash with two-over-two lights. On the first story, there are modern windows with iron guards, but these are in the same location as the originals except that one bay has been filled with glass blocks.

8. Roof: There is a low truncated hip roof which is not visible from the street due to the deep overhang of the cornice.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans: It is not possible to conjecture the plan layout of any of the floors, there being no trace of former partitions. Evidently, the first floor at the northeast corner was important, since the interior columns dividing it into three bays are slender fluted Corinthian columns. A modern mezzanine floor has been inserted here, and thus the capitals are visible only from the mezzanine. All three upper floors have also been changed into open spaces with minor partitions and a freight elevator. The cast-iron columns on these floors are Doric.
2. Stairways: The original stairway is located against the west wall but is no longer accessible from the first floor. The top steps are winders, curving gracefully at a heavy turned newel. The balusters are turned also. Stairs to the other floors seem utilitarian and are enclosed. They may not be original, although they occur over the main stairs.
3. Flooring: The original pine floors are in place on all upper floors; the first floor is covered with vinyl tile and carpeting.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: On all the upper floors, there is either plaster or traces of lath and plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: No original doorways exist.
6. Special decorative features: The only visible remaining elements are panelled window reveals and moulded window trim.
7. Notable hardware: None

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8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating: There are no fireplaces evident; however, there are two flues expoeae on the west wall, second and third stories.
- b. General setting and orientation: This building is located in what was an extensive nineteenth-century commercial and wharf district, and faces north on Dauphin Street and east on Water Street.

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins
Supervising Architect
National Park Service
July 26, 1966
and
Charles A. Herrington
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
June 30, 1972

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as a cooperative project during the summer of 1966 between the Historic American Buildings Survey and various agencies, organizations, and individuals of the City of Mobile. The Historic American Buildings Survey supplied the project supervisor Woodrow W. Wilkins, and three draughtsmen, Carl J. Rosenberg (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Michael R. Foil (Auburn Univeraity), and Lowell K. West (University of Kentucky). One draughtsman, Elbert L. Coleman (Alabama A & M), was provided by the Mobile Housing Board, which agency administers urban renewal. The services of an additional draughtsman, James Eley, specifically designated as an architectural student from Auburn University, were made poasible by contributions from numerous local architects and businessmen. The Historic Mobile Preservation Society, in agreement with the History Department of Springhill College, provided a student historian, Linda Carroll. Office space was supplied by the City of Mobile through the City Planning Commission. Roy Thigpen, a local photographer, was contracted to supply the photographs. All local arrangements were made by the Mobile Historic Development Commission, Mrs. Nancy N. Holmea, President. The project was edited during the summer of 1972 by Charles A. Herrinton, Architectural Historian, in a cooperative effort between the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Mobile Historic Development Commission.